Language Helpers

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Language helpers are an important part of language learning, and I think everyone should have one. But what is a language helper? Simply stated, a language helper is a native speaker of the language you are learning. A language helper is not a teacher or tutor of that language. Actually, he does not need any formal language training, as long as he speaks the language you are learning fluently.

Some other criteria you should consider when selecting your helper.... You will want a language helper who speaks clearly, has a good voice for recording, can read well, and has good writing ability while using correct spelling.

What exactly will your language helper do? He will provide written exercises. He will make audio recordings for you to practice with. He will also clarify grammar points when needed. Perhaps there will be other activities, but these are the primary functions of a language helper. If you are using the language learning method I outlined in my first post Listen. Repeat. Learn., then you will have to train your language helper. Your language helper will likely expect that you are seeking grammar lessons because this is the method most widely taught in schools. But you are looking to learn a language more effectively than by studying grammar.

Firstly, all instruction should be in the target language. Only matters of scheduling and pay should be handled in a language common to you both. You will want to show your language helper that you want to mimic everything he says with normal cadence and correct pronunciation.

If you are a complete beginner in the target language, work together until you can have a short conversation in the target language. Keep a notebook where your helper writes down every word or phrase he is suggesting you learn, but use a separate notebook where you write all new vocabulary words with their definitions.

Using your recording equipment, have your language helper record a few phrases, pausing after each one long enough for you to repeat the phrase. But do not record yourself speaking! This recording will be used later, in between sessions with your helper. Make sure your helper understands how you will use this recording in your studies.

In between sessions with your language helper, you will spend hours studying and reviewing your two notebooks and the recording. Practice until you can say all of the phrases with good pronunciation without referring to the phrase notebook. Do not simply review the recording until you understand the meaning of all the words. The goal is to speak with good pronunciation in the target language, so you must practice speaking using the recording, until you can pronounce the words exactly like your helper.

In your next session together, you could, for example, introduce the idea of verb conjugations. Select verbs from the vocabulary. Have your language helper give you all of the tenses and persons, with other grammatical functions placed within the verb if pertinent to that language. Again you will make recordings to practice with. You can also include example sentences for various persons and tenses.

As you progress in your language learning, you will get to the point where it is practical to use newspaper texts to practice with. One newspaper will last several weeks. While you're with your helper, practice by reading one phrase or sentence at a time, repeating after your helper, until you have perfect pronunciation. Then have your helper record the text so you can practice more later. Don't forget to continue adding to your notebooks and developing verb tables.

You should view the recorded material as the most important part of the time you spend with your helper. While you practice for perhaps an hour with your helper, the recorded material will give you perhaps 4 hours of practice time. You can also use previous recordings for review or on days when you cannot meet with your helper due to illness or other circumstances.

Finding a language helper should not be difficult. If your target language is widely spoken, you should be able to locate a suitable partner. For example, university students trying to earn a little extra money usually make good language helpers. If there is no university closeby, you can use a secondary school or graduate school. With our modern technology, video conferencing is another option.

Language helpers are an invaluable resource, so go find a language helper and get started speaking perfectly in your target language today!